

NEWSLETTER



US 8 Environmental Impact Statement

March 2004

WisDOT District 8 Newsletter Number 5

In this issue:

- Overview
- US 8 Draft EIS Available in May
- Archaeological Field Survey Conducted
- WisDOT Studies Economic Impact of Bypasses
- Indirect and Cumulative Impact Analysis Completed
- Value Engineering Study Recommends Proposals
- Study Schedule

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Overview

This newsletter provides an update on the US 8 EIS activities presented last September. Through the fall and early winter, WisDOT, the study team, and local and regional representatives have conducted in-depth studies to forecast impacts of US 8 improvements on the physical, cultural, and economic environment. These included archaeological field investigations, a study of economic impacts of bypasses to the communities of Turtle lake and Barron, analysis of potential development impacts as a result of US 8 improvements, and a value engineering study. See inside for more details.

US 8 Draft EIS Available in May The study team is on schedule as efforts continue to complete the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) document for public availability in May 2004. A separate newsletter will announce the availability of the document for public review. Copies will be available at local libraries and on the WisDOT Web site. The DEIS describes reasons why US 8 improvements are needed, study alternatives investigated, and the impacts (environmental, social, and economic) associated with each alternative. WisDOT plans to recommend specific alternatives, and these will be presented in the DEIS. WisDOT welcomes public comments on all of the alternatives and on the recommended alternatives.

Once the DEIS is available, the public will have a 45-day review and comment period. WisDOT will host a public hearing in July 2004 to solicit additional verbal and written comments. After the hearing and following review by federal and state agencies, the final EIS (FEIS) will address comments received. The FEIS is expected to be completed by December 2004. It will present the preferred alternatives and propose a prioritization program for construction of these alternatives.



Looking east, this aerial photograph shows US 8 and Deer Lake. EIS proposed alternatives provide new 4-lane corridors south of existing US 8. Photo courtesy of the Deer Lake Conservancy.

Archaeological Field Survey Conducted

A team of archaeologists conducted a Phase 1 field investigation study last fall. The objectives were to identify additional sites along the corridor, verify sites identified from previous record searches, and determine the need for further investigations. Field activities included assessing the proposed project areas on foot and shovel testing areas for potential archaeological finds. Four sites were identified as potentially eligible for the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). These sites will require further investigation if they fall within the preferred alternative alignment. The results of the field investigation studies will be discussed in the DEIS.



The archaeological survey crew is at work shovel testing near Turtle Lake.

WisDOT Studies Economic Impact of Bypasses

Throughout the summer and fall of 2003, WisDOT planners in the Economic Planning and Development section conducted a study of existing businesses and potential future economic conditions along US 8 between Turtle Lake and Barron. The study goal was to determine economic impacts of bypass alternatives for the communities of Turtle Lake and Barron. Results of their analysis are summarized as follows:

- Highway improvements will increase connectivity of the region and make the region more attractive for development.
- Highway improvements will benefit commuters, manufacturers, and tourists. These highway users will notice improved safety and fuel and travel time savings.
- Highway improvements will impact highway-dependent businesses. The Economic Planning Department conducted a license plate survey of local highway-dependent businesses. The survey showed that a bypass around the city of Barron could likely have a negative impact on highway-dependent businesses located on existing US 8. However, bypasses could have a positive impact on manufacturers and service providers. A bypass would allow for better traffic flow and improve travel times.

Indirect and Cumulative Analysis Completed

The study team used expert panels and Delphi Surveys to conduct the indirect and cumulative impact analysis. Both techniques relied on local and regional representatives that had an understanding of local land use development patterns and their relationship to transportation facilities. Some results of the analysis are included below.

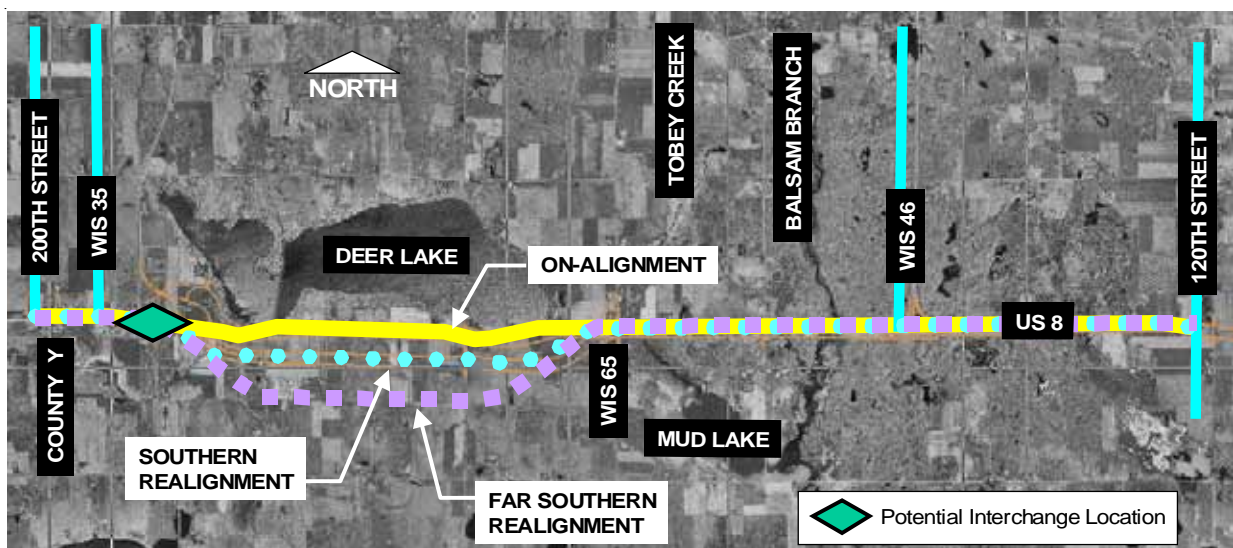
With the exception of the two through-town routes in Barron and Turtle Lake, each alternative is expected to negatively affect agriculture. The expert panels for the city of Barron and village of Turtle Lake had divergent opinions on the bypass alternatives. The Delphi Survey responses also support the differences of opinion. In Turtle Lake, the bypass routes were identified as having negative impacts on the viability of commercial and retail operations and the total number of commercial enterprises. In contrast, the through-town route (Alternative 4) was expected to increase the number of commercial properties and the overall value of properties. In Barron, the three bypass alternatives were expected to positively impact the number of commercial enterprises, overall property values, and the viability of commercial enterprises. Alternatively, the through-town route (Alternative D) was projected to have negative impacts on commercial and retail enterprises.

Value Engineering Study Recommends Proposals

An independent team comprised of engineers and planners worked together for a week in December to review proposed US 8 corridor alternatives that have been developed over the past two years. The VE team looked for opportunities to either reduce costs or increase the function of alternatives along US 8. Both opportunities can help provide a higher value for the public.

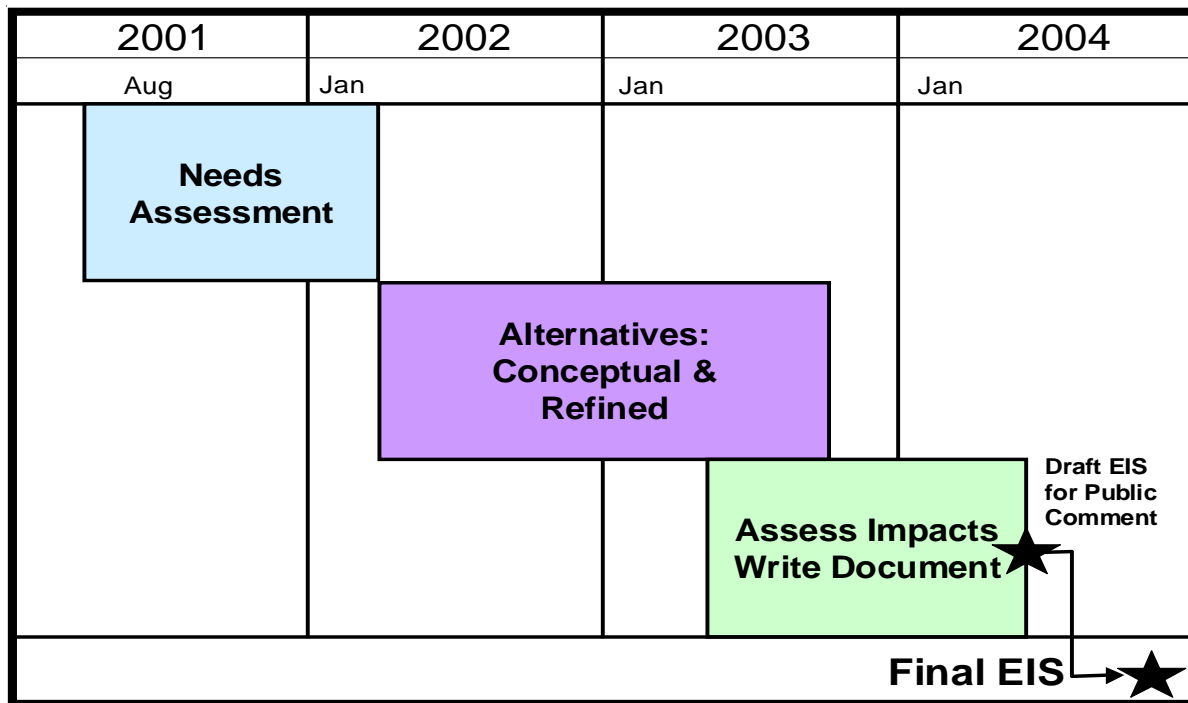
The VE team had several ideas to increase the value of the proposed alternatives. The following lists some of the VE team ideas that will be included in the DEIS:

- Provide a far south realignment alternative at Deer Lake. This new alternative locates the corridor approximately 2000 feet south of existing US 8 along existing property lines. This alternative is approximately 1000 feet farther south of the present south realignment. With this alternative, US 8 would bisect fewer agricultural properties and operations (figure below).
- Consider preserving the existing corridor if the No-build Alternatives are selected for Turtle Lake and Barron.
- Eliminate the Barron Alternative C (North Bypass) grade separation at the rail crossing on the east end of the segment.
- Consider utilizing recently built projects into the new design. Currently, some segments of existing US 8 are close to meeting design standards required for expressways. If the existing road is utilized as two of the four lanes, only the median and two additional lanes would need to be constructed, saving construction costs. In the future when funds are more available, the existing roadway can be upgraded and reconstructed to meet expressway standards.



The new Deer Lake Far South Alternative was proposed by the Value Engineering Study. This alternative will be analyzed in the US 8 EIS document.

Learn more about the US 8 EIS at:
<http://www.dot.state.wi.us/projects/d8/eis/index.htm>



US 8 EIS SCHEDULE

Inside:
US 8 WIS 35 (N) to US 53
EIS Newsletter

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